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RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2158
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 022046

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/16/2016
TAGS: AF IN PGOV PK PREL PTER
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER'S VIEWS ON PAK-AFG JIRGAS, BAJAUR
STRIKE AND COMPOSITE DIALOGUE

REF: A. KABUL 5270
 1B. KABUL 5154
 1C. ISLAMABAD 21223
 1D. ISLAMABAD 21075

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a November 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Kasuri reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to hold a jirga as discussed at the September 27 trilateral iftar at the White House, but noted that Pakistan's vision for the event is limited to the tribal areas along the Pak-Afghan border. Kasuri said that he will review jirga planning with Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta when the two meet in early December, after Government of Pakistan (GOP) offices have held interagency consultations. Turning to the Pakistan military strike against a madrassa/militant training camp in Bajaur Agency, FM Kasuri said he has urged the GOP to be as transparent as possible to allay public outrage. Kasuri explained that his public remarks regarding the resolution Siachen Glacier dispute were geared to a Pakistan audience which is growing increasingly skeptical that the process can produce any significant results. The Foreign Minister described Pakistani expectations for the counter-terrorism mechanism announced at the September meeting of President Musharraf and PM Manmohan Singh in Havana and expressed the GOP's frustration over the decision of a Lahore high Court judge to order the release of Lashkar-e-Tayyba/Jamaat ud-Dawa (LeT/JuD) leader Hafiz Saeed.

Kasuri advised the U.S. to engage Iran on its nuclear program, noting that the Iranian public remains well-disposed toward the U.S. On domestic matters, the Minister fretted over the coming parliamentary debate on the Hudood Ordinance amendments. End summary.

Pak and Afghan Jirgas and Bilateral Engagement

¶2. (C) The Ambassador sought FM Kasuri's perspective on the Pakistan and Afghanistan jirgas which had been endorsed by Presidents Musharraf and Karzai during their September 27 meeting with President Bush. Kasuri responded by describing his telephone conversation during Eid-al-Fitr with Afghan FM

Spanta. After Spanta had described the broad array of participants from across Afghanistan that Kabul wished to include it its jirga, Kasuri politely reminded his colleague that the jirga concept discussed at the White House had focused on the common geographic areas in which the expanding Taliban militancy challenged both governments -- i.e., the Tribal Belt along the Pak-Afghan border. The purpose of these jirgas is to restore peace and security to these areas and to bring local peoples into harmony with their respective national governments. The expanded national jirga currently under discussion in Kabul (Ref A and B) is simply not possible or appropriate in Pakistan, where the jirga process is not part of the national culture beyond the traditions of the Pashtun and Baloch tribes. FM Kasuri told the Ambassador that Spanta accepted this argument, and also agreed with Kasuri's assessment that both the GOP and GOA organizing a tribal jirga is a tricky business. As neither Kasuri (a Punjabi) nor Spanta (a Herati) nor their Ministry advisors have expertise on this Pashtun tradition, they should be guided by their respective experts and then discuss modalities at their upcoming meeting in Kabul in early December. Although Kasuri expected to have productive discussion with Spanta, he cautioned that he could not now guarantee that the GOP would be ready to set a date for the jirga before or at the December meeting in Kabul.

¶3. (C) Kasuri was notably more relating his conversation with Spanta than he was on the subject of the UNAMA non-paper describing the Afghan jirga, describing it as little more than a public relations exercise for the benefit of Westerner donors. If you bring everyone in Afghanistan under one tent, he said, you will so expand the agenda as to preclude

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meaningful progress on priority issues. Better to keep the focus on the tribal members on both sides of the border who are directly affected by the immediate security threat caused by the Taliban resurgence. FM Kasuri was receptive with the Ambassador suggested direct working-level interaction between Pakistani and Afghan jirga planners before the December Ministerial, so that both sides could explain their goals and constraints before each capital's preparations advance and solidify. (Note: Post has since followed up with MFA officials to urge a definite timeline for the GOP's internal interagency planning sessions, followed by direct exchanges with Afghan counterparts. End note.)

¶4. (C) Moving beyond the jirgas, FM Kasuri emphasized that the GOP wants to expand bilateral interaction with Afghanistan at all levels. Kasuri said that he is eager to see Spanta, and would do so sooner but for the heavy schedule of international visitors arriving in Islamabad in the next month. the Foreign Minister noted that the GOP will host the Speaker of the Parliament Qanooni (sp?) in December and that discussions are underway for visits by representatives of Afghanistan's Uzbek community.

Domestic Fall-out over Bajaur Strike

¶5. (C) The Foreign Minister noted that he had been fielding calls all week from worried political workers anxious over the negative voter reaction to the military's October 30 air strike that killed 80-some alleged militants at a Bajaur Agency madrassa. Kasuri said that he has urged his colleagues in the government to release as much information as possible on the individuals who were killed and the evidence behind the targeting, as rumors -- that the majority of the dead were children, that the madrassa was actually hit by a U.S. Predator, etc. -- were rapidly gaining currency amongst the public. The Ambassador noted that Pakistani military has clearly stated the rationale for the strike and accepted responsibility for the outcome, and that President Musharraf has flatly stated that the government was correct in authorizing the strike and would do so again if similar circumstances arise. Observing that the GOP has demonstrated a willingness to enter negotiations with tribal leaders to

restore peace and security to their regions, the Ambassador noted that the Bajaur strike sent a clear message to Taliban and other extremist elements in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that the government will not turn a blind eye to their militant activities.

Indo-Pak Composite Dialogue

¶6. (S) In response to the Ambassador's questions about recent optimistic headlines on the Siachen Glacier dispute, the Foreign Minister admitted that he felt he had to project a positive attitude to generate public support before the Foreign Secretaries meeting in New Delhi on 14-15 November. The truth is, Kasuri confided, the Indians have agreed to the fundamentals of a Siachen withdrawal -- but there objections from the Indian defense establishment is blocking final signature. Kasuri said that, when asked by the Press Trust of India (PTI) about likely deliverables should PM Manmohan Singh visit Pakistan, he hinted at a Siachen resolution; when the interview ran, PTI dropped his qualifying statements. (Note: Kashuri appears unaware that his remarks on Siachen produced any negative reaction amongst the Indian leadership. End note.) Regardless of the press kerfuffle, Kasuri believes that the Foreign Secretaries should work on making the Singh visit a reality.

¶7. (C) Kasuri observed that domestic political concerns prompt Indian leaders to maintain a steady public line of "no progress" in the normalization talks with Pakistan, while he faces the opposite imperative to assure a skeptical Pakistani public that the Composite Dialogue progress is producing tangible results. Noting that he is increasingly concerned

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that even liberal Pakistanis -- long the most vocal constituency for engagement with India -- are dismissing the Composite Dialogue as a waste of time.

¶8. (C) On the counter-terrorism mechanism concept that emerged from the September Musharraf-Singh meeting in Havana, FM Kasuri said that the Foreign Secretaries will discuss the modalities at the New Delhi meeting.

Counter- Terrorism, Domestic Extremism and Hudood Ordinance Amendments

¶9. (C) The Ambassador thanked the Foreign Minister for the MFA's quick action following the discovery that Pakistan Television had run advertising for al-Rashid Trust (ART), a charitable organization under UN 1267 Committee sanctions for terror finance activity. (Note: Having been alerted to the ART ads, MFA officers immediately coordinated with the Information Ministry to ensure that all private and public broadcasters are on notice not to accept business from 1267 Committee sanctioned entities. End note.) The Ambassador also raised the decision of a Lahore High Court judge to release LeT/JeD leader Hafiz Mohammad Saeed from detention. Kasuri noted that President Musharraf was quite angry over the court's action and that the GOP intended to re-arrest Saeed on other security-related grounds. The Ambassador urged that the GOP target LeT/JuD leadership broadly, as the organization is expanding its reach to Afghanistan. The Minister also tasked his staff to confirm the status of the Anti-Money Laundering Bill, which has been languishing in Parliament for months.

¶10. (C) When the Ambassador pulsed the Minister on the prospects for the Women's Protection Bill, the government's proposed amendments to the repressive Hudood Ordinance, Kasuri lamented that moving forward with the bill poses significant risks for the government. The MMA threat to resign if the bill is passed is serious, leaving many in the PML-led coalition uneasy. On the other hand, the government will have betrayed President Musharraf's promise to deliver amending the most oppressive aspects of the Hudood Ordinance if it passes a watered-down bill, inviting unrelenting attack

from coalition partner MQM and opposition PPP and public disapprobation by the international community. The Ambassador noted that failure to respond resolutely to the MMA walk-out threat will expose the government as weak and feckless, leading to a year of prolonged misery in the run-up to national elections. Kasuri sighed in agreement, before saying that President Musharraf shared the Ambassador's assessment that the government should do the right thing and let the chips fall where they may.

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